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Recommendation for funding for a short-duration country programme**

Multi-country programme for Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania and Croatia***

Summary

The present document contains a recommendation for funding from regular resources and other resources for a multi-country programme for Bulgaria, Latvia and Lithuania. The Executive Director *recommends* that the Executive Board approve the amount of $3,033,000 from regular resources, subject to the availability of funds, and $2,250,000 in other resources, subject to the availability of specific-purpose contributions, for the period 2003 to 2005. The Executive Director also *recommends* that the Executive Board approve the establishment of a UNICEF office in Croatia funded in the amount of $600,000 for the period 2003 to 2005 through specific-purpose contributions and private sector fund-raising in the country.

* E/ICEF/2002/11.

** The figures provided in the present document are final and take into account unspent balances of programme cooperation at the end of 2001. They will be contained in the summary of recommendations for regular resources and other resources programmes for 2002 (E/ICEF/2002/P/L.36).

*** Document submission was delayed pending receipt of final data.

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The situation of children and women

1. While many of the goals set forth at the World Summit for Children have been achieved or show continued improvement in Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania and Croatia, new challenges include the increase in HIV/AIDS and substance abuse among young people, the multidimensional impact of poverty on children and families, and social exclusion based on ethnicity or other factors. Reforms in the social sector are well under way, although these may not yet provide equal access to all groups or the range of services previously provided. The decentralization of most social services to local governments is not yet matched by the availability of skilled personnel and financial resources, resulting in additional costs to families for pre-school attendance, school textbooks and after-school activities, among others.

2. Bulgaria, Latvia and Lithuania are candidates for accession to the European Union, which for the latter two is planned for 2004. Processes are under way to harmonize legislation and policies for Union membership. In the three countries, expenditures in the health sector are still below the European Union average of 6 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), and are lowest in Bulgaria at 3.1 per cent. Expenditures in education, however, are slightly higher than the European Union average of 5 per cent, and slightly less in Bulgaria. A variety of civil society organizations (CSOs) have emerged in the three countries, with many focusing attention on child rights and programmes and services for children. Croatia signed a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the European Union in 2001.

3. Bulgaria, with a total population of 7.9 million (2000) and a gross national income (GNI) per capita of $1,510, has seen steady economic growth, although GDP is at 67 per cent of 1989 levels. Both Latvia, with a population of 2.4 million and a GNI of $2,860, and Lithuania, with a population of 3.69 million and a GNI of $2,900, have also seen positive economic gains in the past few years. However, poverty affects many in the three countries, with rural households and families with children among the most vulnerable. In Bulgaria, the Roma (gypsy) community, which comprises around 7 per cent of the population, is reported to be 10 times poorer than other groups (2001 *World Bank Poverty Assessment Report*).

4. Early childhood care services, particularly health care, are well developed in Bulgaria, Latvia and Lithuania, resulting in infant mortality rates below 18 per 1,000 live births and under-five mortality rates (U5MRs) below 22 per 1,000 live births, although these rates are still high based on European Union norms. Immunization coverage remains high. No polio cases have been reported during the past two years except in Bulgaria, which recorded three cases from an imported virus in 2001. The prevalence of iodine deficiency disorders (IDD) has decreased in Bulgaria, although goitre is still reported, and as of 2001, only 73 per cent of salt samples were adequately iodized. Legislation on the importation of iodized salt and national action to promote its use is in place. In Latvia and Lithuania, mild IDD persists and legislation for iodized salt is lacking, resulting in limited availability. Rates of breastfeeding up to four months are estimated at below 40 per cent in these countries. The provision of pre-school services reach around 60 per cent of young children, with access problematic in rural communities and among the poorest households. In Croatia, a U5MR of 9 per 1,000 live births points to a strong underlying situation regarding health indicators for young children, although the reform of social services remains a national priority. At 70 per cent, the iodization of household salt in Croatia is not yet universal.

5. Recognition that young people have special needs and priorities is growing, although comprehensive youth policies have yet to emerge. As of 2001, the number of registered HIV cases continues to be low, with a cumulative total of 320 cases in Bulgaria, 332 in Lithuania, 1,713 in Latvia and, as of the end of 2000, 309 cases in Croatia. However, the rate of increase is of concern, e.g. in Latvia, HIV infections have nearly doubled every year since 1998, when there were 251 cases. The majority of new cases are among young men below the age of 25 years, and in Latvia and Lithuania, primarily among intravenous drug users. The main mode of transmission in Croatia since 1986 remains sexual; the low infection rates related to intravenous drug use remain stable. An increase is seen in the number of women affected and a small, but growing, number of cases through mother-to-child transmission. Based on "Voices of Youth" poll reports (2001), between 24 per cent (in Croatia) and 40 per cent of children in the other three countries have little or no information on HIV/AIDS. Rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among young people are high, increasing their vulnerability to long-term fertility problems and HIV infection. Other risk factors include an increase in the share of births to single mothers under 20 years of age; a rise in substance abuse; and generally high youth unemployment rates, around double the national rates. The participation of young people in organized groups has declined, and there are limited opportunities for constructive leisure time activities. All four countries have extensive HIV/AIDS preventive programmes, which are increasingly targeting young people.

6. The basic education gross enrolment rate (1999) is over 90 per cent in the four countries and secondary school enrolment rates are high, with no disparities between girls and boys reported. An increasing number of children, however, do not attend school regularly and do not complete basic education. In Bulgaria, an estimated 45,000 school-age children do not attend school, with Roma children comprising one half of this group. Roma children face numerous problems, including psychological testing systems that lead to the placement of a disproportionate number of young Roma children in special schools for children with mental handicaps. Due to cultural practices and early marriage in some communities, Roma girls reportedly leave school before completing basic education.

7. An increasing number of children are in need of special protection measures. Domestic violence, family breakdown and substance abuse adversely affect children and young people. The "Voices of Youth" poll reports in the four countries found that over 60 per cent of children reported violence in the family. Juvenile crime rates are high. Lithuania has taken specific steps towards a comprehensive approach to the establishment of a juvenile justice system based on the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, with similar efforts emerging in Bulgaria and Latvia. In Bulgaria, around 38 per cent of children aged 5-17 years work either in paid employment or on household farms. An International Labour Organization study (2000) estimates that around 27 per cent of these children are working in hazardous situations.

8. In spite of the decline in fertility rates during the past decade, the numbers of children living in state care institutions remain high, e.g. over 35,000 children in Bulgaria, and a disproportionate number of these children are Roma. The number of infants admitted to "infant homes" has risen steadily. Institutional care is also the primary care option for children with disabilities, although both Latvia and Lithuania have introduced mainstreaming of children in regular schools. The World Bank has provided support to Bulgaria, Latvia and Lithuania for child care reform,

aiming at family-centred outcomes for children and families at risk, with positive results beginning to emerge.

9. While second reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child are overdue for Bulgaria, Latvia and Lithuania, the observations of the Committee on the initial reports submitted earlier remain valid. These include the need for increased budget allocations for meeting the needs of children; attention to the rights of minorities; and the need for enhanced services to promote the health and well-being of children, including information on HIV/AIDS and reproductive health for young people. Lithuania appointed an independent Ombudsman for Child Rights in 2001, while in Croatia, the process of establishing the office of an Ombudsperson for Children continues. The National Centre for the Rights of the Child in Latvia and the State Agency for Child Protection in Bulgaria have been established to promote the rights of children, undertake research and recommend legislation. The "Voices of Youth" poll reports in the three countries, however, point to the need for further steps to promote awareness and action on child rights. In Bulgaria, 50 per cent of children were aware of children's rights and could name at least one, with this increasing to 72 per cent of children in Latvia, 60 per cent in Lithuania and 83 per cent in Croatia.

Programme cooperation, 2002

10. The early childhood care and development programme has focused on the promotion of universal salt iodization (USI) and breastfeeding. In Latvia and Lithuania, advocacy continued for the enactment of legislation on the importation of iodized salt and for the development of a multisectoral national plan of action to eliminate IDD by 2005. In Bulgaria, UNICEF provided equipment to salt producers to increase the availability of iodized salt and conducted training for health professionals. One of the results during 2002 is the inclusion of the goal of IDD elimination in the national food and nutrition plans now being finalized by Bulgaria, Latvia and Lithuania.

11. UNICEF met with the three Governments to advocate the incorporation of breastfeeding promotion in the primary health care (PHC) reform process, including teaching lactation management in the pre- and in-service training of health professionals, and institutionalizing the assessment of baby-friendly hospitals within the ongoing hospital certification procedures. Breastfeeding promotion has been included in the draft national food and nutrition plans, and continued support to national efforts through government and non-governmental organizations is planned.

12. In the child protection programme, as a follow-up to the Regional Consultation on Protection of Children Against Sexual Exploitation, organized jointly by the Council of Europe and UNICEF and in collaboration with the Government of Hungary, and the Second World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Yokohama (December 2001), technical support was provided to review the implementation of national action plans in Latvia and Lithuania, and to identify good practices, training and other resources and steps needed to enhance their implementation. Technical assistance was also provided to Bulgaria to support the preparation of its national plan. In Croatia, during 2002, UNICEF has funded a social policy adviser to provide technical assistance to the Government and civil society to build capacity in child rights and child protection issues. Activities included an assessment study on the status of children's and women's rights and the

scope for social policy advice; support for the establishment of a children's ombudsperson's office; support for the drafting of legislation and a code of practice for non-governmental organizations (NGOs); and support to the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare on national standards for foster care, juvenile justice and children with special needs.

13. Together with Ministry of Justice of Lithuania and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNICEF has supported a subregional consultation on juvenile justice for professionals, NGOs and other stakeholders from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The purpose of the consultation was to exchange experience and recommend further steps in the context of the situation of the participating countries. A study on juvenile justice in Bulgaria was completed, and a national consultation is planned for the second half of the year. In the area of children deprived of parental care, UNICEF continued to work with the World Bank in the regional programme "Changing Minds, Policies and Lives", with the testing of toolkits on the redirection of finances in Latvia and the toolkit on standards of child care in Bulgaria under way. The results of these activities will inform UNICEF cooperation later in the year and as part of the 2003-2005 programme.

14. The young people's health and development programme involves close collaboration with co-sponsors of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). In Bulgaria, UNICEF continues to support the Social Development Unit of the United Nations Resident Coordinator's office, together with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UNAIDS and UNDP, and with the collaboration of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention. In cooperation with the Canadian International Development Agency and the ANTI-AIDS Coalition, through UNICEF Romania, support was provided to NGOs to increase public awareness on HIV/AIDS, and preparatory activities for the introduction of health education curricula in schools were launched. UNICEF supported the training of 30 teachers and 70 peer educators, who reached over 2,000 young people in 2002. The MONEE (UNICEF Regional Monitoring Project) "Youth Discussion Guide" and the "Voices of Youth" poll report have been translated and launched in 15 cities, resulting in local action projects. A National Youth Framework has been prepared through a consultative process with young people and government officials, which will be used in the development of national youth policies. In Latvia, together with UNDP and UNFPA, support is being provided for the implementation of the National Youth Development Programme, which includes the development of materials for young people on peer and life skills education. Similar activities are under way in Lithuania through the WHO-Euro Network of Health Promoting Schools. A subregional consultation, organized in collaboration with UNDP Lithuania and UNAIDS co-sponsors on youth-friendly services, resulted in a strategic framework for national advocacy and programme development throughout the region. In Croatia, UNICEF and national partners conducted a Rapid Assessment and Response project among especially vulnerable young people as a part of an initiative for HIV/AIDS prevention in South-Eastern Europe. The goal of the project was to gather data that would assist in the development of programmes to improve the health of young people, reduce vulnerability and strengthen prevention.

15. As part of the social mobilization for child rights programme, the preparation of a number of publications on policy advocacy was undertaken, including: research for the 9th MONEE report on the theme of children with disabilities (launch planned

in 2003); the TransMONEE database; and a new annual publication, "The Social Monitor", which provides an overview of issues affecting children. Reports on the situation of children and women in Bulgaria, Croatia, Latvia and Lithuania are also under way. In preparation for the United Nations Special Session on Children, advocacy events involving children, NGOs and Government were supported in the countries, including the "Say Yes" campaign, which promoted awareness of child rights. UNICEF supported the participation of children and members of civil society from all four countries at the Special Session as part of the process to develop post-Special Session national strategies and action plans. UNICEF also supported national consultations to select national representatives to the Regional NGO Network.

Lessons learned from past cooperation

16. Consultative planning between UNICEF and government counterparts to clarify responsibilities and ensure phased commitments to programme areas must start at the beginning of the programme cycle. This planning process needs to incorporate the necessary milestones for government ownership and sustainability of programme interventions.

17. Joint financing of programme staff with other United Nations agencies under the United Nations Resident Coordinator system has increased programme capacity for the development and implementation of programmes for young people in Bulgaria and Latvia. This has resulted in additional government investment in the areas of HIV/AIDS and building health education in schools based on life skills and in communities through peer education. This approach will be expanded to Lithuania.

18. As noted by government officials during the planning process, the positive advocacy role of National Committees for UNICEF in activities such as the promotion of USI and breastfeeding and building awareness of the Convention on the Rights of the Child was recognized, demonstrating the importance of their supportive role in achieving goals for children. Collaboration with the National Committees in advocacy will be expanded, and support to enhance their capacity will continue.

Recommended programme cooperation, 2003-2005

Estimated annual expenditure

(In thousands of United States dollars)

	2003	*2004*	*2005*	*Total*
Regular resources				
Early childhood development	100	100	100	300
Child protection	300	300	300	900
Young people's health and development	350	350	350	1 050
Cross-sectoral programme	261	261	261	783
Subtotal	**1 011**	**1 011**	**1 011**	**3 033**
Other resources				
Early childhood development	250	250	250	750
Child protection	250	250	250	750
Young people's health and development	250	250	250	750
Cross-sectoral programme (Croatia)	200	200	200	600
Subtotal	**950**	**950**	**950**	**2 850**
Total	**1 961**	**1 961**	**1 961**	**5 883**

Country programme preparation process

19. Beginning in 2001, reports on the situation of children and women were initiated in Bulgaria, Latvia and Lithuania, with the support of government agencies, United Nations partners and NGOs. They drew extensively on the Common Country Assessments, the "Voices of Youth" poll reports and national studies. United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs) are not planned in these countries due to the limited United Nations presence. During 2001-2002, several planning visits to the three countries were undertaken. These included reviews of ongoing collaboration with government ministries (Health, Welfare, Education and Science, Justice and Foreign Affairs), United Nations agencies and other partners, as well as consideration of the areas of future collaboration within the framework of the UNICEF medium-term strategic plan (MTSP) and their relevance in each country. The programme framework was shared with the three Governments and other partners. In Croatia, throughout 2001-2002, the UNICEF Special Representative for the Balkans and his staff in the Area Office have engaged with the Government, civil society partners, UNDP and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in a dialogue on the continuing advocacy and technical assistance role of UNICEF in the country, together with discussions on modalities for supporting a UNICEF presence in country. While an UNDAF is not planned in Croatia due to the limited United Nations presence, other collaborative programming frameworks, such as the United Nations Theme Group on HIV/AIDS and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Programme, led by the World Bank, have been pursued.

Country programme goals and objectives

20. The overall objective of the programme of cooperation will continue to be the realization of the rights of children, young people and women in Bulgaria, Croatia, Latvia and Lithuania. The programme will contribute to the elimination of IDD by 2005; the integration of breastfeeding in the PHC system to increase breastfeeding rates; and good knowledge on the causes and preventive measures of HIV/AIDS and other at-risk behaviours among 90 per cent of children aged 10-19 years. It will also contribute to policy reform and actions that aim to reduce the number of children entering public care; promote family care alternative options and increase opportunities for the reintegration of institutionalized children in society; prevent the commercial sexual abuse, domestic and other forms of violence, and exploitation of children; and strengthen systems within Government and civil society to monitor and support implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Relation to national and international priorities

21. The framework of the multi-country programme is based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the outcome of the Special Session for Children, "A World Fit for Children". The programme addresses issues and recommendations referred to in the Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. The end-decade reports submitted by each of the Governments for the Special Session outline specific national priorities, plans and programmes for addressing child rights and enhancing programmes for children. These include the Child Protection Act and the role of the State Agency for Child Protection in its implementation in Bulgaria; and in Latvia and Lithuania, national programmes for the prevention of sexual abuse of children, and the respective mandates of the National Centre for the Rights of the Child and the office of the Ombudsman for Children's Rights in promoting awareness and monitoring of the Convention.

Programme strategy

22. Building on past cooperation, national preparations for the Special Session on Children and "A World Fit for Children", UNICEF will seek to strengthen new alliances among Government, civil society and NGOs in joint actions for children. Young people's participation is a component of the strategy. Capacity-building among government agencies and NGOs to promote and protect child rights will continue through networking, technical support and policy research. Advocacy efforts aim to ensure that the children's agenda adopted at the Special Session will be translated into action through incorporation into national plans and targets, and these must be supported by resource allocations and legislative and policy reforms. Advocacy efforts will include European Union institutions given the interest in pre-accession development cooperation. Contingency planning and support for emergencies that may arise during 2003-2005 will be incorporated within the programme framework.

23. Lithuania has achieved the UNICEF threshold levels of gross national product per capita and U5MR according to the UNICEF Executive Board decision on allocation of regular resources (E/ICEF/1997/12/Rev.1, decision 1997/18), and

Latvia is near the criteria. Should these conditions continue, UNICEF regular resources-funded programmes of cooperation would be phased out. UNICEF will continue to advocate for increased national resource mobilization to sustain and enhance activities supported during the past five years and the proposed programme.

24. **Early childhood development (ECD)**. The programme aims to promote a good start in life for all children through advocacy and support for implementation of legislative and policy reforms that promote the sustained elimination of IDD through USI and breastfeeding promotion. In Bulgaria, assistance will aim to prepare the country for verification of elimination status by 2004, while in Latvia and Lithuania, support will be provided for the development of a national action plan for IDD elimination, legislation on USI, strengthened monitoring of IDD incidence, and advocacy for creating public demand for iodized salt. UNICEF will also support the training of health professionals and representatives of health insurance agencies on the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative, research on its benefits, and public advocacy activities to create a greater demand for baby-friendly hospitals and support for breastfeeding through PHC services.

25. **Child protection**. The programme will concentrate on protecting the rights of children at risk and deprived of parental care by promoting policy and social protection system reform, with a focus on de-institutionalization and family-centred outcomes. This will include the promotion of quality family support social services and articulation of national strategy for the effective protection of children from sexual violence and exploitation. The strategy will include the strengthening of a normative framework, awareness-raising and behaviour change, as well as improved systems for the identification of risk, exposure to violence and early intervention. UNICEF will facilitate the provision of technical assistance, tools and protocols for the development and documentation of good practices, and promote active networking and information exchange as well as basic systems for monitoring and evaluation. UNICEF cooperation will complement assistance by the World Bank in social sector and child-care reforms as well as national efforts by Government and NGOs.

26. Support will be provided for the preparation of national action plans based on "A World Fit for Children" through a participatory process involving Government, CSOs, youth organizations and the private sector. Advocacy and support for the establishment of ombudsmen for child rights in Bulgaria and Latvia will be undertaken, as well as support to enhance the work of the ombudsman in Lithuania. The strengthening of state agencies for monitoring child rights in Bulgaria and Latvia through documentation of good practices, research in specific areas of concern such as Romani girls' education in Bulgaria, early learning opportunities for unreached children, and juvenile justice reforms are among the specific topics to be considered.

27. UNICEF will continue to support the publication of monitoring and technical publications of the Innocenti Research Centre in Florence, Italy, in collaboration with national statistical agencies. UNICEF will also support advocacy activities on child rights of the National Committees and actions needed at the national level for their realization.

28. **Young people's health and development**. The programme will promote national policy development and activities which involve young people in the design, implementation and evaluation of information, education and community

services that promote healthy lifestyles, particularly with regard to major threats such as HIV/AIDS, substance abuse, STIs and unwanted pregnancy, in complementary programme collaboration with UNAIDS co-sponsors. Peer education activities and the incorporation of life skills-based education in school curricula will be supported. Advocacy for the development of youth-friendly policies and programmes will be a part of PHC services. UNICEF will provide technical support, and promote the networking of knowledge gained and sharing of best practices. An evaluation of the programme will be undertaken to review the effectiveness of the strategy in reaching young people.

29. **Cross-sectoral programme**. A project officer will be responsible for the management of the programme in Bulgaria, Latvia and Lithuania, including the development of the annual plans of action and support for their implementation, monitoring and reporting.

30. In Croatia, UNICEF will support a cross-sectoral programme of advocacy and technical assistance to Government and civil society as follow-up to the Special Session on Children in general and to ongoing activities, notably with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and the National Council for Children, in respect of child protection in particular. Advocacy to increase the level of salt iodization will be pursued as a key factor in improving ECD. UNICEF will continue to support efforts to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS and other risks to adolescents and young persons in Croatia through the United Nations Theme Group and NGO partners. The cross-sectoral programme will be funded by expanded private sector fund-raising activities, as well as UNICEF greeting cards and product sales. The Government of Croatia will also support the UNICEF presence through the provision of office facilities. In addition to fund-raising, stronger links to the private sector will promote salt iodization and other social marketing actions in respect of children's and young people's health.

Monitoring and evaluation

31. The monitoring and evaluation plan will include those assessments and evaluations of the above-mentioned programmes. Specific indicators, based on the MTSP, to measure progress will include: households utilizing iodized salt; legislation for USI in Latvia and Lithuania; changes in breastfeeding rates; improved knowledge on HIV/AIDS; numbers of children living in institutions and/or in family-type environments; and legislation in place on specific issues such as sexual exploitation, abuse and domestic violence. This information will be collected through specific studies and as part of programme support for programme monitoring. The TransMONEE database will continue to be developed and used for monitoring trends affecting children and women.

Collaboration with partners

32. UNICEF will work primarily through government agencies, national and international NGOs, and United Nations partners. UNICEF works directly with UNAIDS co-sponsors in programming related to HIV/AIDS prevention, and life skills and peer education. Collaboration with the World Bank will continue towards the de-institutionalization of children. Collaboration will continue with WHO-Euro

and the International Baby Food Action Network in nutrition policies and programmes that promote breastfeeding and micronutrient deficiencies. Collaboration towards the USI goal will also continue with Kiwanis International, the United States Agency for International Development, the Micronutrient Initiative, the Programme Against Micro-nutrient Malnutrition, the International Council for the Control of IDD and the European Salt Producers Association. The National Committees for UNICEF will be a partner in advocacy activities and with the Innocenti Research Centre in policy research and publication of MONEE reports.

Programme management

33. Programme planning, implementation and reporting will remain the responsibility of the Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Baltic States. A project officer will be responsible for the management of the programme. Regional advisers will provide technical support in their respective areas. In addition, in-country collaboration will be enhanced through continuation of joint financing of staff through respective offices of the United Nations Resident Coordinators. Allocation of resources will be determined by the Regional Director, based on the needs of children in each country. During the programme period, an enhanced presence of UNICEF in Bulgaria will be explored. While the UNICEF office in Croatia will fall under the overall policy guidance of the Regional Office, it will continue to be managed operationally by the UNICEF Area Office located in Belgrade.